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Blackmail in Beirut

Islamic Jihad issues an ominous warning to Washington

Once again the grainy color photographs showed the harrowed faces of hostages. This time the pictures of four Americans and two Frenchmen, delivered last Thursday to several daily newspapers in Beirut and printed by some of them the next day, came accompanied by an ominous warning: unless the government of Kuwait agreed to release 17 Muslim fundamentalist terrorists jailed there for bombing the U.S. and French embassies in December 1983, the American captives would suffer "catastrophic consequences" and their captors would "terrorize America and France forever."

The message presented the U.S. with an

The terrorists had previously threatened to execute their captives but had not explicitly linked the hostages' fate with that of the prisoners in Kuwait. The same group is believed to have hijacked a Kuwaiti airliner last December and killed two Americans aboard in a futile effort to win freedom for their terrorist brothers. In its message to the hostages' families last week, Islamic Jihad declared, "For the last time, we wish to stress that all contact with your relatives will be cut off and the consequences will be catastrophic if you do not act seriously and force your governments to intervene."

That warning, combined with the

sponse, State Department Spokesman Bernard Kalb said that the Administration was prepared to "facilitate such private efforts." At week's end President Reagan declared, "If Jesse Jackson can do anything, that would be just fine." However, White House Spokesman Larry Speakes made it clear that "we have not negotiated with terrorists before, and that is our policy."

The U.S. has warned the government of the Ayatullah Ruhollah Khomeini, which is believed to be providing Islamic Jihad with material and spiritual assistance, that the U.S. will hold Iran responsible for the fate of the Beirut hostages. Three months ago, when Islamic Jihad threatened to kill one of the Americans it was holding, Secretary of State George Shultz told Iran that it would suffer military consequences if any of the captives in Lebanon were harmed. Though it was by no means clear precisely what the Secretary had in mind, a senior State Department official added last week, "That is a permanent warning that Iran should take seriously."

—By William E. Smith.

Reported by John Borrell/Beirut and Johanna McGeary/Washington



The hostage gallery: Carton, Buckley and Anderson, top; Fontaine, Weir and Jenco

A threat of "catastrophic consequences" and a vow to "terrorize America and France forever."

excruciating dilemma. Until now none of the Westerners kidnaped by the shadowy forces of Islamic Jihad, or Islamic Holy War, has been killed. But the situation is worsening as the Shi'ite extremists step up their demands. The four Americans pictured in the terrorist photographs were: Terry Anderson, 37, Associated Press Beirut bureau chief; the Rev. Benjamin Weir, 60, a Presbyterian minister; the Rev. Lawrence Jenco, 50, a Roman Catholic priest; and U.S. Embassy Official William Buckley, 56, who was abducted on March 16, 1984, making him the longest-held American captive. A fifth American, Peter Kilburn, 60, a librarian at the American University of Beirut, has been missing since December, but no mention of him was made last week. The two Frenchmen in the photographic lineup were Diplomats Marcel Fontaine and Marcel Carton.

gaunt images of their loved ones, persuaded the families to make public pleas to Washington and Kuwait to reverse their long-standing refusal to meet Islamic Jihad's demands. At a news conference in Washington, Peggy Say, sister of the kidnaped Anderson, warned that the situation had reached "the crisis point." Said she: "This new demand, this ultimatum, makes me feel we've got to work harder before something very bad happens." The Rev. Jesse Jackson, to whom Islamic Jihad's latest message had also been addressed, joined the families in putting pressure on the Administration. The 1984 presidential candidate, who in December 1983 had gone to Syria to arrange the release of a captured U.S. Navy pilot, said he was willing to go to Lebanon or Kuwait or even Tehran if there was "any reasonable chance to have an impact." In re-

When a car bomb exploded on March 8 in a Beirut suburb, killing more than 80 people and injuring 200, there was little doubt as to the attack's target. The detonation took place just 50 yds. from the home of Sheik Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, spiritual leader of the Hizballah (Party of God), a militant pro-Iranian Shi'ite group. Several of Fadlallah's bodyguards were among the victims, but the sheik, who was in a nearby mosque, was uninjured. No one ever claimed responsibility for the incident.

Last week the Washington Post reported that the bomb attack was the work of mercenaries hired by members of a Lebanese intelligence unit that had secretly received counterterrorist training and assistance from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. The CIA did not know about the attack beforehand and had no control over it, the Post said. Alarmed that even this indirect association with such an incident could damage U.S. interests in the Middle East, the Reagan Administration canceled its connection with the Lebanese intelligence agency.

Though not identified in the Post story, the Lebanese unit involved was widely presumed to be the Deuxième Bureau, the intelligence branch of the Lebanese Army. The unit is dominated by Maronite Christians with close ties to the 6,000-member Christian militia called the Lebanese Forces. Intelligence sources in Washington speculate that agents of the Deuxième Bureau, possibly acting on their own, hired outsiders to carry out the car bombing. The Lebanese Army high command flatly denied any official involvement in the attack. As for the CIA, it insisted that it had not trained the agents involved in the bombing.